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TAGS: PREF PREL PHUM TH
SUBJECT: VISIT OF PRM ASSISTANT SECRETARY SAUERBREY

REF: BKK 05693

Classified By: AMBASSADOR RALPH BOYCE, REASON 1.4 (B,D)

¶1. (C) Summary. During an August 26-September 2 visit, PRM Assistant Secretary Sauerbrey informed the RTG of the USG decision to extend the material support waiver to Karen refugees in other camps in Thailand. Thai officials welcomed this development. A/S Secretary Sauerbrey requested RTG approval for additional U.S. processing of North Korean refugees. Thai officials responded that they were concerned that resettlement would draw large numbers of North Koreans to Thailand. The RTG was uneasy about a U.S. resettlement program for this group that had no end point. A/S Sauerbrey expressed concern that the RTG not take actions, such as deportation, that would endanger the safety of the Petchaboon Hmong. RTG officials' responses indicated that the Thai government is struggling to find a solution to this issue, but in the near term was unlikely to engage in large-scale deportations. Thai officials reiterated their willingness to consider proposals to permit Burmese camp refugees to work legally, but indicated that this would have to occur in the camps or close nearby. End summary.

¶2. (C) Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) Assistant Secretary Ellen Sauerbrey visited Thailand from August 26-September 2. She met with RTG officials and representatives from NGOs, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), conducted a joint visit to Tham Hin refugee camp with UNHCR High Commissioner Antonio Guterres, saw USG-funded refugee assistance activities in Umpiem Mai refugee camp, and held a press roundtable.

Meeting with Thai National Security Council Head

¶3. (C) Accompanied by the Ambassador, A/S Sauerbrey met August 28 with Thai National Security Council chief General Winai Pattiayakul and informed him of Secretary Rice's decision to extend the material support waiver, beyond Tham Hin camp, to members of the Karen ethnic group in six other camps along the Thai-Burma border. Sauerbrey noted that the USG was also considering a waiver for ethnic Karen in the two remaining border camps. She added that changes in U.S. laws, rightfully enacted after 9/11 to protect national security, had had unintended consequences for refugee resettlement. Winai responded that Thailand was grateful for the cooperation with the United States on refugee resettlement. He welcomed the news on the waiver expansion. He said he would make sure that all parts of the RTG worked to support U.S. resettlement efforts. A/S Sauerbrey said the

USG recognized that Thailand had been a generous host to thousands of refugees over many years.

¶ 14. (C) Winai said that he was disappointed by the lower than expected number of Karen in Tham Hin camp who had taken the U.S. resettlement option. The Thai government should have done better in encouraging Tham Hin residents to choose resettlement. Winai said he had told the Ministry of Interior to do more to convince them. A/S Sauerbrey stated that the uncertainty created by the material support issue may have caused Tham Hin residents to hesitate. There was also the problem of having situations where one family member was not eligible for U.S. resettlement because of material support. It would take a change in U.S. law to allow approval of the ineligible.

¶ 15. (C) A/S Sauerbrey raised North Korean refugees and said that the USG understood the RTG's sensitivities and had done its best to handle the issue discreetly. She asked if the RTG would permit the USG to process additional cases for U.S. resettlement. Winai responded that the RTG appreciated U.S. efforts to keep the issue low-profile. The RTG felt comfortable working with the ROK and the USG. However, the NGOs involved were not under control and were doing what they wanted. For example, the recent arrest by Thai immigration officials of North Koreans was caused by an NGO sheltering about 200 persons in a 10-room house.

¶ 16. (C) Winai said he had recently met with the Deputy Prime Minister responsible for security matters. They had discussed North Korean refugees and understood the implications of U.S. legislation. Winai stated that the RTG was not comfortable with U.S. resettlement that had no end point. Estimates of the number of North Koreans in China were high, up to 200,000. The RTG was quite concerned about a pull factor. The use of Thailand as a resettlement hub could cause big problems. It was lucky that the DPRK had not complained to the RTG about resettlement. This made the issue easier to address. Winai asked if the USG had any suggestions.

¶ 17. (C) A/S Sauerbrey responded that the number of North Koreans in China was unclear. The USG did not think that large numbers of North Koreans would be drawn to Thailand. Travel through China was difficult. Noting that the USG understood the RTG policy on case-by-case consideration of North Koreans, A/S Sauerbrey suggested that the RTG consider a process whereby North Koreans expressing interest in U.S. resettlement and held in Thai detention be "expelled" to the United States. This would allow the RTG to demonstrate that it was adhering to its immigration law. Winai acknowledged that the RTG had discussed a case-by-case approach with the USG, but said that it was hard to see a good solution on this issue.

¶ 18. (C) Turning to the Petchaboon Hmong, A/S Sauerbrey stated that the USG was concerned that the RTG not take actions, including deportation, that would endanger the Hmong's safety. The USG was also concerned about a possible food shortage among this group. Winai replied that the RTG hoped over the long term to address the Petchaboon Hmong with the Lao government. The issue was difficult, but without the Lao government's help, the issue would be never-ending. Winai said he had discussed the food situation with the UN country team and hoped that a recent UN assessment would help solve the problem. The RTG did not want to make a contribution because that would send the wrong signal to the Hmong, including those in Laos, that the Petchaboon Hmong would be able to stay in Thailand over the long term.

¶ 19. (C) Winai said that the RTG would try to move the Petchaboon group to another, camp-like location closer to the Lao border in the hope that they would be encouraged to return to Laos. Most of the group were from Laos, including some who entered Thailand after the announcement of the Wat Tham Krabok resettlement program. Some were Hmong from northern Thailand who had highlander status, but went to Petchaboon seeking U.S. resettlement. Winai said that the

group was free to leave Petchaboon and return home. However, they did not seem to want to do this. If resettlement was not possible, they wanted to stay in Thailand. A/S Sauerbrey noted that the budget situation was tight, but PRM would look to see if there might be USG funding available to alleviate any food shortage.

¶110. (C) A/S Sauerbrey noted that Thailand had large labor needs and asked why the RTG could not issue work permits for Burma border camp refugees. Work was important for refugees, especially for young persons, in protracted refugee situations. Winai replied that the RTG was concerned about this issue. During a visit to a refugee camp, the Prime Minister had said that additional refugee vocational training would prepare Burmese refugees for resettlement or repatriation. Some Thai investors were interested in employing refugees as factory workers in locations distant from the refugee camps and close to cities. The RTG was not comfortable with this. The refugees might decide not to return to the camps when their employment ended. It would be better to establish factories close to the refugee camps and have the refugees leave and return to the camps on a daily basis. Winai concluded that the RTG agreed that the status quo could not continue and all would benefit by increased training, educational, and work opportunities for the border camp refugees.

¶111. (C) Winai said that IOM had asked him to encourage the USG to consider the Wat Tham Krabok site as a transit center for future resettlement processing. The site's owners had agreed to the site's use for this purpose and the RTG was prepared to help. Refcoord responded that PRM was aware of this idea, but there were many factors to consider, including the uncertainty until now about future refugee resettlement flows from Thailand. With the progress on material support, it might be possible to think about this concept.

Meeting with Ministry of Interior

¶112. (C) In an August 28 meeting, Ministry of Interior Deputy Permanent Secretary Chairerk Distha-Amnaj welcomed A/S Sauerbrey's news about the material support waiver extension.

In response to a question regarding RTG policy about work opportunities for camp refugees, he said that the RTG planned to relocate those Tham Hin refugees who remained after the completion of the U.S. resettlement program. The RTG would need some assistance with funding, but was considering a site ten times the size of Tham Hin. The provincial governor would have the authority to invite companies to locate close to the site to provide work opportunities for the refugees.

¶113. (C) A/S Sauerbrey noted the importance of family unity in the U.S. refugee resettlement program and asked that the RTG develop special procedures that would allow timely resettlement processing and exit permits for immediate family members who joined a case late in the process or were P3 or visas 93 beneficiaries. Chairerk responded that persons in these categories would have to be approved first by the Provincial Admissions Boards, but there were now fast track procedures to facilitate this process. A/S Sauerbrey also urged Chairerk to issue individual identification cards to refugees, in keeping with previous RTG commitments. Chairerk responded that the RTG expected to issue the cards before the end of the year.

¶114. (C) In response to a question about the Petchaboon Hmong, Chairerk stated that the RTG wanted to return them to Laos over the long-term, but the current approach was to "let them stay for awhile." The RTG was unsure how to deal with this problem. It would not send the group back to Laos involuntarily, but returns were possible if conditions were safe. Chairerk said that some of the group were Thai-Hmong and the RTG did not want them to disperse from Petchaboon.

Meeting with Ministry of Foreign Affairs Permanent Secretary

¶15. (C) During an August 28 meeting with Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Permanent Secretary Krit Garnjana-Goonchorn, A/S Sauerbrey announced the extension of the material support waiver and said she was also hopeful that there would be a change in U.S. law that would help those refugees not covered by the waiver. Krit welcomed the news on material support and expressed gratitude for U.S.-Thai cooperation on refugee matters. Resettlement of Karen was a good solution for a protracted refugee situation.

¶16. (C) A/S Sauerbrey said the USG was concerned about the Petchaboon Hmong situation. A/S Sauerbrey asked if the RTG had heard anything from the Lao about the 26 Hmong minors. Krit lauded U.S.-RTG cooperation on the Wat Tham Krabok resettlement program, but noted that an unexpected fallout was the Petchaboon Hmong situation. The RTG was trying to handle the Petchaboon group in a manner consistent with its humanitarian tradition, while also staying mindful of the pull factor. The RTG did not envision further resettlement. The RTG had had little success in discussing this issue with the Lao government, which denied that the Hmong were from Laos. Krit said the Lao government was still saying it could not locate the Hmong minors.

¶17. (C) A/S Sauerbrey said the USG had great interest in North Korean refugees and understood Thai sensitivities. There were now 28 North Koreans in Thailand who were seeking U.S. resettlement. A/S Sauerbrey said that the USG wanted to quietly process the group for resettlement. She suggested the "deportation" idea previously mentioned to General Winai. Noting that Under Secretary Dobriansky had called him about the North Koreans, Krit said that the RTG was worried about the pull factor. The Thai National Intelligence Agency estimated there were 20,000 North Koreans waiting to enter Thailand. There had to be an end in sight to any U.S. resettlement to provide a sufficient comfort level. The emergence of smuggling rings related to the North Koreans, while not yet sinister, was also a concern. The RTG was not applying a draconian policy and was not acting in a manner inconsistent with its humanitarian tradition. South Korea was a clear alternative destination. A/S Sauerbrey responded that the USG did not envisage a massive flow of North Koreans going to Thailand. More were moving to Mongolia. (Note: Following the departure of A/S Sauerbrey, Krit informed the Ambassador that there might be some progress soon on some of the pending North Korean processing requests. We consequently received RTG permission to resettle 16 North Koreans in Thailand to the U.S. See Reftel. End note.)

Meetings with IOM and USAID

¶18. (U) A/S Sauerbrey told IOM Representative for Southeast Asia Irena Vojackova-Sollorano about the extended Karen waiver and the likelihood of a Chin ethnic group waiver in coming months. Vojackova-Sollorano responded that IOM had still not received Malaysian government permission to open an office in Kuala Lumpur but was cooperating well with UNHCR and could handle increased Chin resettlement by sending staff from Bangkok. She urged A/S Sauerbrey to consider opening a refugee resettlement transit center at Wat Tham Krabok given the expanded Karen waiver. Such a center would require \$2.5 million in start-up costs for a facility able to handle 2,000-3,000 persons, but IOM expected that these costs would be repaid within two years by the operational savings of having a transit center. Camp resettlement programs, such as Tham Hin, typically last 2-3 years. It would not be cost efficient to have a residual IOM operation in Tham Hin at the same time that IOM was setting up operations elsewhere to support U.S. resettlement efforts in other camps. IOM staff also provided a overview of their migration and anti-trafficking activities.

¶19. (C) In August 30 and 31 meetings, A/S Sauerbrey received a USAID briefing on its assistance activities for migrant workers and camp refugees in Thailand and internally displaced persons in eastern Burma. ARC and IRC representatives provided information about their PRM-funded

refugee camp activities and their need for additional funding to conduct income generation and sex and gender based violence assistance activities. The USCIS District Director provided a briefing on his office's refugee interviews in the region and his views on the Chin and Montagnard caseloads. The head of the Thailand-Burma Border Consortium discussed recent changes in RTG refugee policy and the background of the current Burma border refugee situation.

**T20. (U) This message was cleared by A/S Sauerbrey.
BOYCE**